STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DANIEL K. AKAKA

After the Dust Settles: Examining Challenges and Lessons Learned in Transitioning the Federal Government

Hearing

Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Today's hearing will take a look back at the 2008-2009 Presidential Transition, its challenges, and lessons learned that can improve future transitions.

The most recent transition happened during a time of unprecedented economic troubles, heightened national security threats, and management challenges across the government.

In advance of the 2008 election, this Subcommittee held two hearings examining our readiness for the transition. At those hearings, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the General Services Administration (GSA), and the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) discussed their extensive planning and preparations for the transition.

Today, 15 months after President Obama was sworn into office, I am pleased to say that it appears that this early planning and preparation laid the groundwork for a smooth transition. Although some problems were revealed, I believe this was one of the most successful transfers of power to date.

Beginning well before the election, the Bush administration ordered agencies to identify career individuals to take on leadership roles while political appointees left the administration. This would ensure management continuity in critical areas until new people were appointed and brought up to speed.

In addition, the Obama campaign took advantage of provisions in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, which allowed advance security clearances for individuals who were to work in the transition or later in the administration.

The GSA worked with both campaigns to make sure they would have the administrative and financial support needed for the transition. With that assistance, the Obama-Biden Transition Project started immediately after the election. Early on, the Transition Project deployed teams of subject matter experts to review agencies across the government. Some of these experts later filled leadership roles within the agencies.

Before his inauguration, President-elect Obama named several nominees for high-ranking and national security positions. By January 22nd, the Senate confirmed 15 of the 36 nominees submitted by Inauguration day.

At our Subcommittee hearing in September 2008, then OMB Deputy Director for Management Clay Johnson recommended a goal of confirming 100 nominees by April. While we did not get to that number, the Senate did confirm over 50, an improvement over the previous transition.

I remain concerned about the pace of nominations and confirmations. Strict vetting and high standards for nominees are important, but they do create a slow and complicated process. I believe there is still room for improvement in the nomination and confirmation process.

I have pressed the White House for action on several important Veterans Affairs nominations, including the Assistant Secretary for Management. Filling management positions must be a high priority across the government. I also hope to receive a nominee to lead the Office of Special Counsel, which is in great need of strong leadership, in the near future.

More can be done to encourage more advanced planning before the election.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of Senator Kaufman's Pre-election Presidential Transition Act, which would encourage planning and provide additional resources for candidates before the election. It would also make clear that candidates may raise funds to supplement the government allowance for their transition.

I look forward to hearing from the exceptional group that we have assembled here today. As leaders in different aspects of the incoming and outgoing transition teams, I think that you all deserve credit for making this a smooth and transparent process.